





Half Million Homeless

# Sri Lanka Disaster

More than half the coastline of the island nation was hit by tsunami waves and flooding, killing foreign tourists as well as local people from all its ethnic and religious groups.

It took two hours for the tsunami to cross hundreds of miles of the Indian Ocean from the epicenter of the earthquake to the beaches of Sri Lanka. But then it played the same devious trick upon tens of thousands of fishermen, villagers, tourists, shopkeepers and others that it did in Indonesia.

First the sea withdrew leaving the ocean floor exposed. Then it returned with a fury. A 15-foot tall wave raced up the beach and smashed houses, hotels, cars and a train.

Amid the wreckage of his home in the village of Kalmunai Kuby, in the Eastern province of Ampara, Abdul Kafoor, 36 recalled how 2,500 people in his village of 16,000 people died that morning.

"My wife and three of our children died," he said, as his two surviving kids clung to his sarong.

Villagers spent the days, one month after the tsunami hit, in tents pitched beside their ruined homes, while the government studied where it would be safe to rebuild.

Those whose original sites are deemed unsafe will need new land, resources and planning for new livelihoods. Until then, the displaced sleep in temporary housing or the homes of friends and relatives. Each day they leave those homes—so as not to burden their hosts—and pass the time next to their former homes.

USAID in mid-March was helping to construct 4,000 transitional shelters to protect families during the upcoming rainy season and until the government designates land away from the sea for permanent housing.

The tsunami in Sri Lanka killed 31,000, including hundreds of British and other tourists. More than 4,000 more people remain missing and are most likely dead.

**MARKING THE SPOT:** Sri Lankan fishermen spend their days at this tent to mark their destroyed homes in Kalmunai Kudy, Ampara Province, but sleep inland with relatives while the government decides where they can rebuild.





## U.S. Government Aid to Sri Lanka

## U.S. military aid supplied included:

- Marine helicopters lifted relief supplies to coastal villages.
- Military ships supplied fresh water in initial stages of relief.

## Civilian U.S. aid totaling \$62 million as of April 1, 2005 included:

- 7 airlifts valued at \$1.5 million
- Water containers for 75,000 people
- \$25 million in emergency food
- \$19 million for cash-for-work clean up
- \$1 million for traumatized children, child protection and anti-trafficking

About 550,000 people had their homes destroyed and live in schools, tents, temples and churches or with host families.

More than 300 NGOs came to this island nation of 15 million people off the southeast coast of India to help after the tsunami. U.S. Marine helicopters ferried relief supplies from Colombo's port over the mountains in the center of the island to the damaged areas of the south, east and north.

By the end of February, U.S. aid to Sri Lanka was close to \$70 million—nearly all in emergency relief.

The cost to reconstruct damaged infrastructure will be over \$1.5 billion, the International Monetary Fund estimated.

One of the biggest economic blows from the tsunami was the loss of about \$3 billion

in tourist revenues throughout the affected region, Visa International estimated.

Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar said March 18 "tourists should return to Sri Lanka despite the devastating impact of the December 26 tsunami." In fact many of the hotels on the south coast had been repaired and reopened with tourists slowly returning.

The shock and terror of the tsunami is beginning to fade. Six weeks after it hit, Sri Lankans stroll along the Galle Face promenade by the sea in Colombo. A sun sets tranquilly over the water and children fly kites or chase balls along the sandy shore.

In the villages of Ampara, fishermen slowly are repairing their boats, many with U.S. aid, and returning to the sea.



**TEMPORARY HOUSING:** Workmen set up temporary housing in Sri Lanka so that survivors can move out of schools and tents while permanent reconstruction takes place.

DOROTHY RAYBURN / USAID

## USAID IN SRI LANKA

USAID ALREADY HAD A TEAM of development workers in place and a mission based in Colombo so it was able to quickly use those assets to deliver fast relief to survivors.

Wayne Brook had already spent two years as a USAID development contractor in Ampara, Sri Lanka—the hardest hit province. "So I immediately shifted to relief," he said.

First USAID gave grants to hospitals for equipment and outreach to treat the injured, shipping the equipment overland from Colombo. Next it provided generators and water pumps to camps for the 150,000 people in displacement camps in his province.

Then tools and equipment from shovels to wheelbarrows were given through local NGOs to help people clear debris and open routes. Next he arranged for volunteers from the mainly ethnic Sinhalese south to come to the east and help do clean up along with the local ethnic Tamils and Muslims in the east.

This was aimed at bridging differences in society caused in part by the lingering 25-year Tamil separatist uprising by the Tamil Tigers.

A senior Sri Lankan minister said that 60 percent of the tsunami damage took place in areas controlled by the Tigers and that a

proportionate amount of foreign aid should go there. However the U.S. Government has listed the Tigers as terrorists—they are blamed for the suicide bombing that killed Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, among others—so aid is being provided directly to the needy without building up the Tigers—a delicate task.

Brook, with USAID's Office of Transitional Initiatives, next began cash for work programs, hiring survivors to clean up schools and roads. The Agency also leased heavy equipment such as front end loaders, excavators, tractors and trailers.

The next task was to hire local masons and carpenters to build latrines and water tanks for temporary schools UNICEF was building. USAID also hired multi-ethnic teams of welders and carpenters to repair school furniture.

Hundreds of large trawlers, fiberglass outrigger canoes and small motorboats—some built with USAID support—were destroyed in the tsunami. The agency began helping with repairs, new boats, nets, engines, floats and training.

Damaged government offices and schools were given computers, printers, photocopiers, chairs, desks and internet access.